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IS FAITH IN GOD DECADENT?

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Much the most important change in theological opinion which has taken place during the last half-century has reference to an altered conception of God, and, as an inevitable consequence, of his relations to the world of things and of men. This change was originally neither initiated nor approved by theologians themselves. It was rather commended to them, or even forced upon them, by modern science and modern philosophy. The attitude, however, of these two sources, or prime causes, of change toward the questions involved and toward the then reigning theological position on these questions was in certain important respects markedly different. Physical and natural science, proceeding painstakingly but rapidly by means of experimental methods, and making use of the facts discovered by these methods as a basis for induction, arrived at a quite new conception of Nature. This conception was either frankly or tacitly, but always quite decidedly, opposed to the idea of a Divine Being as a supernatural person and worker of miracles, interposing within, or acting contrary to, the working of a mechanical system under the control of natural laws. Thus during the greater part of the nineteenth century these sciences were regarded by the most tenacious adherents of the dogmas of orthodoxy as distinctly anti-theological, if not also anti-religious.

Meanwhile philosophy, so far as it was faithful to its central aim of finding some Idea which should appear to harmonize all spheres of human experience and to satisfy the demands made by all sides of human nature, undertook to reconcile the new views of natural forces and natural laws and of the history of natural evolution with the essential faith and practices of religion. In other words, it undertook so to conceive of the being of the world as to adapt the conception of the physical and natural sciences to the demands of religion for a superhuman and morally worthy, if not in the strictest sense of the word *supernatural*, object of faith and worship.

At first, and for a considerable time, this attempt of philosophy was regarded in theological circles as little, or not at all, less dangerous and irreligious than the tenets of modern science. Indeed, there were certain obvious reasons why philosophy should be met with a more hostile attitude than it seemed convenient or necessary to oppose to the new scientific conception of nature. For the latter might be considered as simply "science," and so as moving in a plane different enough from that of theology to make it impossible that the two should come into a square conflict. This was, indeed, only a "might-be," a mere seeming. The actual fact was that the new conception of the world and its possible relation to any personal God was essentially incompatible with the older forms of theological dogma. In a word, modern science was slowly but convincingly proving either that the world is a godless world or that the conception of God and of God's relations to the world, as held by the then dominant theology, must be essentially changed.

But if much of science was deemed to be atheism by the orthodoxy of this period, the attempts of philosophy at reconciliation were almost universally deemed to be a more or less skilfully disguised pantheism. In some sort "pantheistical" they certainly were. But so far as they were not systems of pantheism, like the naturalism of Strauss or the materialism of Haeckel (to take examples standing in time at the extremes of the period we are considering), they were not more pantheistical than is Biblical religion; they were less so than are all other Oriental religions, if we include the mystical sects of Mohammadanism and exclude its more rigidly orthodox forms of monotheism.

Already theology has gradually yielded to the influences which it so hotly and fearfully contested, has gone a notable way toward absorbing the positions of both science and philosophy, and has somewhat radically changed its conception of God and of his relations to the world both of things and also of souls. We say "also of souls"; for although the abolishing of the sharp distinction between the natural and the supernatural in the sphere of physical things and events was the first to yield to the efforts at harmony of reflective thinking, the inevitable result of extending the same point of view into the realm of mental and

spiritual affairs was soon reached. Thus the changed conception of the God of nature was followed by a change in the conceptions of revelation, inspiration, sacred Scripture, and of the conduct, ideals, and growth of the religious life.

In some such way it was that the older forms of deism and theism, with their common belief in a quasi-personal Divine Being as the creator of a Nature capable of running itself, and their bitter controversy over the question whether this Being ever intervened by way of enacting a miracle or other supernatural event, have been alike discredited. Quite commonly now, by theologians, philosophers, and men of science alike, God as the object of religious belief and worship is thought of as immanent in nature and in humanity, the Life, present everywhere and ever, of the world of things and of spirits. As supernatural,—being from the ideal point of view over and above, but not outside of or unconcerned with, nature, the world, the universe (choose what word you will for the sum-total of all phenomena, whether regarded as causes or as effects),—he is not parted from the natural. Natural and supernatural must never be looked upon as mutually exclusive spheres. It is not true of some things and of some souls, or at certain times only, but of all nature and of all humanity, and at all times, that in Him is life, motion, and being.

It is interesting and suggestive in this connection briefly to notice the more recent tendencies of opinion in science, philosophy, and theology,—the three ways of looking at one and the same problem. It is not too much to say that there is notably less crude and open antagonism between theology and the physical and natural sciences than there was during the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century. Nor is this fact wholly due to changes in the positions of theology. In most questions of the details of the constitution and history of nature, science has, as was right and inevitably to be expected, triumphed over theology. But science itself is more cognizant than it formerly was of its own barrenness and insufficiency in attempting to give a final account of nature. It is more ready to admit the claim, confirmed both by psychology and metaphysics, that the notion of a unity of forces operative in the universe, really argues for

the dependence of all individual beings on One Will. It is disposed to confess that the term "law" (even when spelled with a capital), if it means anything more than the expression of an unexplained fact, namely, that there is generally a partial and approximate uniformity in the sequence of similar phenomena, implies the control of active ideas as innate to the deeds of that One Will. And in general, its entire theory of the universe as a closed and impenetrable mechanism has of late shown the plainest signs of breaking down utterly.

On the other hand, theology, when once the outer barriers to a new conception as proposed by a reconciling philosophy had given way, has hastened—sometimes in quite unnecessary and even unseemly fashion—to defer, even though that might compel the relinquishment or important modification of some of its most cherished doctrines, to the newest, as yet unverified tenets of evolution, or to the unrecognized "authority" of the private caprices of some novice in natural science. Thus it has happened that not a few theologians have become quite superfluously heretical as judged by the ancient standards, while of the body of clergymen in general it is not too much to say that no other class of persons are more easily gullible by "oppositions of science falsely so called."

Meanwhile philosophy has in several quarters been outstripping science, and urging on theology to make friends with those whom only a few years ago it had considered as belonging to the mammon of (intellectual) unrighteousness. Hence there has arisen a large crop of new and bizarre forms of the "theory of reality."

On the whole, however, it does not admit of doubt that the conception of God and the divine relations to the world which characterizes the reflective thinking of the age is, from the purely intellectual point of view, a vast improvement over the conception which it has superseded. Its establishment, its convincing influence over theology, in spite of the opposition which it has somewhat persistently encountered from theology, is the most important contribution to a new and improved system of theological thinking which the last century has to show.

If now we seek for some expression which shall picture, if it does not accurately define, the important change which we are

considering, it would be a true though somewhat startling description of it to say: It is little less, essentially considered, than the *rehabilitation of the ideal of a Living God*. The Divine Being, as conceived of by the French and English deism, was a barren abstraction, invented chiefly to supplement the theoretical explanation of the beginnings of things in terms of the crude physics, chemistry, and biology of the time. As has been truly said, it had not the life in it, nor the power over human life, of the conception of God held by the North American Indian. But the Divine Being as conceived of by the theism which, in the interests of piety, opposed this deistical belief was, in his immediate relations to nature, too spasmodic and incalculable to satisfy the demands of the natural sciences or the conclusions of reflective thinking. God as immanent in the world, God as the abiding "Ground" of the evolution of physical life and of the development of the life of reason, God as the personal and ethically perfect Will, realizing his ideals in the universe of things and of spirits,—this is a conception which has been welcomed by thousands of the most profoundly thoughtful and deeply religious souls as one on which science, philosophy, and theology might cordially unite.

The most unreserved claims of superiority for the modern—which is at the same time the more ancient—conception of God do not, however, afford an off-hand answer to the question we are now to consider. For there is a very great difference between holding a conception and having a faith; and this difference is apt to be greatest in matters of religious concernment. The question, "Is faith in God, as a matter of fact, decadent?" can be convincingly answered only by an appeal to the facts of the moral and religious life,—the sphere in which the faith corresponding to the conception ought properly to be apparent and to be dominant. But these facts are vastly more complicated and difficult of access than are those facts on which we may rely for establishing changes in philosophical and theological opinions.

How, then, shall we discover whether this improved way of *thinking about* God has become an active principle in the *soul's attitude* and in the *conduct of life*, as from moment to moment in the immediate presence of God? To take a census of all who make profession of such a faith is plainly impossible. To rely on

vague general impressions for the answer to such a question is easy, but it can scarcely be called satisfactory as the basis of a conclusion. But the question is a pressing one, and its true answer would determine much as to the direction of our hopes and our fears, as well as our practical activities, respecting the future of religion in this country; and likewise of all the other interests which depend so largely upon religion as a form of faith controlling life.

It is with no pretence of affording a convincing argument, but in the modest hope of stimulating inquiry, that the following suggestions are offered as bearing on an affirmative answer to this grave practical problem.

If we read the religious books current among the men and women of two generations or of one generation ago, we can scarcely fail to notice how much they dwelt upon the unquestioned right of the divine commands to control the conduct of life, and upon the divine all-seeing eye as taking unceasing cognizance of the way in which these commands were recognized and obeyed. That this is not true in the same way and to the same degree on the part either of the writers or the readers of the religious books of today, it seems to me impossible to deny. But here let not the point of the consideration be misunderstood or wholly missed. It is not that our way of trying to find out what are the divine commands has so largely changed; that pious people no longer open the Bible at random and find therein God's word everywhere alike, without raising the questions, by whom, to whom, when and where and for what purpose, this alleged word of God was spoken to men. To make these inquiries is an obligation which follows as a corollary from the improved conception of God. The discouraging token of this literature is, rather, that it is neither written nor read as though all of man's life must be lived, in order to be lived aright, as in the sight of an ever-present and living God. The same characteristic regard for the divine command is to be noted in the letters and diaries of pious folk of fifty and seventy-five years ago. I have been reading of late much of this form of testimony. These old letters and diaries seem to be pervaded with the comforting conviction that life's duties and trials are to be accepted—those discharged, these borne—as in the presence

and with the help of a living God. I know that not a few—perhaps the majority—of those who could be dismissed from one church to another with a certificate of “good and regular standing” would look upon the language of such antiquated type as suggestive, if not plainly expressive, of cant. But here is not the temptation of the Christian Endeavor Society, of the teacher or practitioner of Christian Science or other form of so-called faith-cure, or even of the class-meeting in some Methodist church. Here is the soft breathing, in private, of one soul’s experience with God into the sympathetic ear of another soul; or—what is still more significant—of one lone soul into the ear of God. No; for my part I do not believe that this form of testimony to faith in God is to be suspected of any considerable measure of cant. And if the present lack of such expression be accounted for as due to the increased modesty or secretiveness of the modern man and woman, the reply at once suggests itself: In what other notable respects are the professedly pious people of today more modest and secretive than were their forbears?

But it may be said that deeds speak louder than words, and that this is especially true of the religious life under modern social and economical conditions. No really pious person can be otherwise than sincerely and heartily glad at the present increased interest in the social and economic welfare of the great body of the people; and no student of history can fail to recognize that much of this interest has been, and still is, the direct or indirect result of religious principles and of the religious motive. On the other hand, we are led to raise the inquiry whether most of the awful pressure for the radical reform of existing moral, as well as economic and social, evils, is not due to the lack of a practically operative faith in God as the guardian of the poor and the oppressed, and as the avenger of the unrighteousness and crime which inevitably grow out of greed, cowardice, and selfish political and social ambition. In a word, the very evils which demand an increased faith in an ethically perfect Divine Being, and an intimate experience of him in the effort to realize the ideal of Jesus, “Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect,” seem to indicate a widely prevalent decadent condition of this kind of faith.

There are three dependent forms of faith in a living God, the

existence and efficacy of which in practical ways might afford a measure for testing the answer to our main inquiry, as to whether faith in God is decadent. These are the faith in God as Providence, the faith in God as the Giver of eternal life, and the faith in God as the indwelling Redeemer of humanity.

That the conception of God and of his relations to the world which, under the influence of modern science and modern philosophy, has of late more and more prevailed, is opposed to a certain form of the theological doctrine of providence, admits of little doubt. This doctrine selected a certain set of persons, and certain relations and occasions, within which somewhat too exclusively it stood ready to admit a divine control over human affairs. In this selection it was tempted to give the preference to such events in the life of the individual as seemed most favorable to the success of the individual's own plans. Thus not infrequently it became the gratification of human wills which was thought to give token of some special action of the Universal Will. But the conception of an immanent personal Life in and through all nature and in every event of human history logically requires a much more closely fitting and truly universal doctrine of providence; and it is eminently adapted to foster a much more devout, as well as reasonable, faith in God as providence. It permits and it demands that each individual shall lay the foundations of his creed and of the conduct of his life in what Luther declared to be the hardest thing of all to believe: "*I am Jehovah thy God.*" It lifts above the mirage of mere sentiment and the uncertain clouded regions of emotion into the heights of rational faith, the exhortations and the experience of Jesus. It regards the lilies of the field, the birds of the heaven, even the sparrows that are sold at two for a penny, as wholly within the sphere of the divine providential care. How much more, everything that concerns the discipline of a soul which aspires to realize the calling of a son of God! Such a soul will make no meaningless babble or formal recital of an address to "Our Father in heaven." And when its prayer is for the gift of daily bread, or for deliverance from that which is evil, there will accompany these petitions a steadfast and embracing trust that these, and all other requests, will be answered wisely and faithfully, in and through each experi-

ence in our human lives of the indwelling divine Life. It is this kind of faith in God as providence which animates the question of the Rig Veda, "Whom shall we worship but Him who is the sole King of the seeing and living creation?"; which inspires the resolve of Augustine, "I will pass beyond this power of my nature also, rising by degrees unto Him who made me. . . . Yea, I will pass beyond it, that I may approach unto Thee, O sweet Light"; and which above all others furnished the *motif* and the explanation for the words and life of Jesus: "Yea, Father, for so it was well pleasing in thy sight."

By common consent of those competent to pass judgment, the present is an age of dissatisfaction and unrest, world-wide and profound, beyond anything belonging to the past history of the race. Instead of this condition abating, as the opportunities for comfortable living are more widely distributed and the amenities and moralities of civilization are rising (for so the case stands, according to general but not universal agreement), it is becoming more prevalent and more intense with every year. As the price which providence exacts for these advances in material welfare and social privilege rises in correspondence with their increase, the revolt against the exaction becomes more open and more pronounced. In some it takes the form of avowed and determined, or hesitating and spasmodic, attempt to escape the evils of living in a world that gives no proof of being governed in the spirit of tender pity by a so-called heavenly Father; in others it stiffens into defiance or relapses into sullen despair; in still others it takes the form of callous indifference. In how few does the experience of these evils, when they invade one's own life-circle, awaken a still more reposeful and comforting faith in God as providence!

Is then the faith in God as providence decadent in the present age? Are men, whatever their theory of the divine immanence may be, really living, more than a half-century ago, as though in a godless world? It is indeed again impossible on this precise point to take a census of individual experience. No one would venture to say how many, what percentage of the entire population or of the Christian churches, there be, who do their daily work, accept their share of ordinary vicissitudes of evil and good, and of extraordinary trials of grief, disappointment, and loss,

with an abiding and reposeful faith in providence. Certainly, the more obvious phenomena of business, of menial labor, and of domestic administration, of politics and of social intercourse, do not on the surface indicate that the number of those who *realize* the doctrine of a providential control of the universe, as a compelling and comforting principle for the conduct of a truly pious life, is very large.

The attitude of faith in God as providence is a matter of the most intimate personal experience. Its essence is founded largely in a deed of the will. It involves a choice between being in rebellion against the universe because it does not treat us as we think it ought, and placing ourselves on terms of confidence and affection with this universe as knowing better than we what is best for us and for all mankind. It represents the practical side of an ideal conception of nature and of human history, that sees behind the more obvious appearance of the facts a meaning which they do not readily, or of necessity, disclose to each observer. It requires prophetic vision and apostolic self-renunciation to believe reposefully in God as providence, and to shape all one's life in the confidence of this belief. The sort of "practicalism" demanded by much of the current philosophy, by most of the customs regulating social life, and by all the usages of politics, diplomacy, and business, is opposed to this faith. One must be something of a mystic to have faith in God as providence. And although it follows logically from that conception of the Divine Being which affirms that all life, motion, and being are in Him, it can not easily overcome the obstacles which it encounters from the characteristics of this so-called practical age.

The case is not the same with the second form of that faith to which we addressed our appeal in the effort to find some answer to the main inquiry we are discussing. How, now, in the popular favor stands the faith in God as the giver of eternal life? From time immemorial the immortality of the human soul has been regarded as the doctrine standing nearest to the belief in a personal God, and almost equally essential for maintaining the foundations of the Christian religion. God and immortality were two of the three beliefs which Kant undertook to establish on foundations of moral intuition, after he had removed by criticism

the pretence of theology to establish them on grounds of scientific demonstration. The attempt of Kant in its negative result was seemingly successful. Less and less, since the Kantian criticism prevailed, have the arguments, as such, for the soul's immortality seemed conclusive to the reflective thinking of modern men. Even the reasoned conviction of a *posse non mori*, established on moral grounds, with which this criticism displaced the *non posse mori* of the older theology, has been assailed with experimental proofs by science in the form of biology and physiological psychology. This assault has not only modified, but has almost destroyed, the confidence with which theologians were wont to announce the doctrine of immortality as a matter of almost indisputable proof. It has weakened or dissipated the faith of thousands in their own conscious existence after death, and for these same thousands the hope of meeting the loved ones who have preceded or shall follow them into that which lies beyond death. Nor has that effect upon the conduct of this life which depends upon the faith in God as the giver of eternal life been of small account.

As the guardian and inspirer of true religion, the fear of future punishment and the hope of future reward, when impressed by external influences upon the individual, have never been of real and enduring value. It is not to be regretted, therefore, that the motives they once furnished to lead the life of religion have been greatly diminished in these latter days. On the other hand, the essential nature of true religion is such as to make it a matter of grave doubt whether it could continue in existence for long, if the support of a belief in the immortality of the individual were wholly withdrawn. For it is the continuity of life, and of the issues of life, and of the character formed by the discipline of life, that renders the practical faith in immortality of so essential value to religion.

If now we consider that attitude of science toward the theological doctrine of immortality which has shaped itself to accord with recent biological, physiological, and psychological investigations, it would seem more favorable, or at least less hostile, than it was twenty-five and even fewer years ago. In the judgment of the writer, the latest results of cerebral physiology and

of physiological psychology are distinctly more concessive, if not conducive, to the view which advocates a reality and possible separate existence for the soul in independence of the present physical organism. But even this improved attitude of science is of scarcely more than negative value in the argument which aims to establish the theological doctrine of immortality. Still further is it from producing the practical faith in God as the giver of eternal life. It does, indeed, remove some of the obstacles to continuing in this faith under the temptation to abandon it for intellectual reasons; in certain cases it may suggest this faith to those who, for reasons chiefly emotional and sentimental, are already well disposed toward its espousal. But to science it is as yet in vain that we appeal for proof.

In his "Aphorisms on That which is indeed Spiritual Religion" Coleridge speaks of "certain convictions" under which one "can tranquilly leave it to be disputed in some new Dialogues in the shades, between the fathers of the Unitarian Church, on the one side, and Maimonides, Moses Mendelssohn, and Lessing, on the other, whether the famous passage in Paley does or does not contain the three dialectic flaws, *petitio principii*, *argumentum in circulo*, and *argumentum contra rem a premissis rem ipsam includente*." As a matter of fact, in all the more thoughtful and spiritual religions it has been a conscious attitude of loving and trustful communion with Him who is the Life of the world of souls and of things that has engendered and supported the belief of the individual person in his own immortality. The basis in reality for this conscious communion is to be found in the essential unity of ethical spirit, which is perfect in the Divine Being, and which is struggling toward perfection in all the sons begotten of this Divine Being. Therefore it is no unmeaning paradox to say that the faith in God as the source and giver of eternal life is its own best argument. It can not, indeed, be communicated to others in the form of arguments. It can be obtained only in the form of an experience; but it may be made reasonable by a knowledge of the collateral evidences which are afforded in the conception of God as the immanent Life of the World and so in a very real and special way the source of eternal life to all his sons.

It was a measure of this faith which prompted the Stoic slave

Epictetus to exhort us: "Dare to look up to God and say, 'Make use of me for the future as thou wilt. I am of the same mind. I am one with Thee.'" It is this same faith which inspires the declaration of the Bagavadgîtâ: "He who has known me as the Lord of sacrifice and of penance, the mighty Ruler of the worlds, and the Lover of all beings, goeth to peace." But pre-eminently is this true of all Jesus' teachings and of all his deeds, where, to employ the words of a German theologian, "the approach of eternity awakened in Jesus the recognition of all that is essential, of all that endures in the sight of God." Indeed, it is the characteristic and dominant thing about the Christian faith that with all God's dear children eternity should ever be near at hand, in the mind's eye and in the affections of the heart. The veil between the two worlds is thin; indeed, there are no two separate worlds, but only one—the realm of the Father—in which the life of the men of filial spirit is spent. This is the attitude of mind and will toward both lives, the present and the future, the earthly and the super-earthly, which essentially accords with the religion of Christ.

But is this, in fact, "the attitude toward both lives" which prevails in the Christian world at the present time? It is indeed true as the writer just quoted also says: "Even though later on the eschatological drama receded ever farther into the background, and this earth and the present raised their claims on man ever louder, yet eternity surrounds us ever in the garb of time, and its demands are the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. . . . Jesus' words condemn his own church down to the present day."

Whatever we may think as to the relative morality of the Christian world in comparison with previous ages, and whatever one may decide as to the question whether it is worse or better; whatever we may claim as to improvement in creeds and increased interest and activities touching social welfare; and highly as one may appreciate and praise the advances made in these and other respects, one can scarcely avoid the confession that the claims of "this earth and the present" were never more loud and insistent than at this very present time. Never before were they more inclined to confuse and overwhelm the faith and the practice dependent upon the conscious nearness of the world unseen and eternal.

That the theological doctrine of the immortality of the individual is not accepted with anything approaching the unanimity of a generation ago, there can be, I think, no reasonable doubt. Even those who adopt a certain conception of God, as at least a sort of Unity of intelligent force in nature, and as a power making for righteousness in human history, find themselves unconvinced as to the belief in the continuance of the conscious life of the individual after the dissolution of the physical organism. The demonstrative arguments employed by the pre-kantian philosophy and theology for a natural indestructibility of the soul seem as inconclusive to most psychologists as does the argument of Plato from his theory of reminiscence and prenatal ideas. Even as a belief relying on the teachings of Scripture and the promises of Jesus, this doctrine has not, apparently, anything like its old-fashioned power to comfort the mourning, assure the dying, and bring peace to those who are in hopeless conflict with what are for them the present and prospective conditions of temporal and earthly welfare. There are few to whom the future joys of heaven seem to afford any measure of compensation for the unseized or unattainable benefits and pleasures of the present life.

For such a change of mental and practical attitude toward the doctrine of immortality I can find no adequate account in the increased strength of the objections derived from modern science and modern philosophy. These objections are not essentially different from those which have been urged against the belief from the time men began seriously to question its grounds. In modern times the most acute form of the physiological contest has never been a clear victory for either side. To the unprejudiced expert the battle, as waged on this level, has always seemed to result in a draw. And, as I have already said, the vitality and cogency of the scientific objections have of late been diminishing in force. There seems, therefore, no other so obvious explanation for a decline in belief in the doctrine of immortality as a positive decadence in the faith in God as the giver of eternal life,—and, indeed, a lack of interest and appreciation for those eternal and unseen things in the right attitude toward the values of which the essence of the Christian religion consists.

From this new and improved conception of the Divine Being should follow, logically, a more reasonable and firm faith of a practical sort, in God as the redeemer of humanity. And, surely, never before were the demands upon such a faith more strenuous and insistent than at the present time. If we look the civilized world over, we may note everywhere a more or less clearly conscious apprehension of important and somewhat awful political and social changes, impending and not for long to be delayed. The faces of an incalculable host of human beings, some wan with hunger and disease, some pale with anger or despair, some flushed with envy and hatred, some lighted with the dawns of a new intellectual and moral experience or with expectations of a coming victory, are seen gathering for a determined assault upon the political, economic, and social, and even upon the legal and religious forces that for nearly two thousand years have held the world of civilized men under their control. With enormously increased vigor and portent the lower and the lowest ranks of the democracy are coming to the front in human affairs. Observers are dividing themselves in opinion as to the result into schools of optimism and pessimism, and, as to the methods of dealing with the problems which this rise of the democracy creates, into schools of co-operation, of conciliation, or of armed resistance to the very end. Some anticipate the vast improvement, and some the utter destruction, of existing institutions, when Socialism succeeds—as it now seems destined to succeed—in carrying through its avowed plans. Some rely on education, some on the laws of that vague and uncertain thing called “social science,” and some on the police and the army. Religion relies on God,—but not as an abstraction, or as a blind mechanism, or as an absentee spiritual force, but on a Living God, immanent in and operating through all the economic, political, and social forces for the redemption of mankind.

Those whose memories reach back toward the middle of the last century remember with what hope the new age was anticipated; it was to be renovated by modern science; its wants were to be supplied by modern industry; its wisdom and obedience to natural and social law were guaranteed by modern education. That the hope has not been realized in all its fulness is a mild

statement of the truth. So far as statistics can establish anything, they confirm the prevailing dissatisfaction with the reigning systems of politics, of education, of church administration; and with the prevalent tone of the moral and religious life.

It is notable that in all the great and successful reforms of the past, those who have worked and suffered in them have done all with the persuasion that God is in the world, and that the strength of all workers for the uplift of humanity has its source in his omnipotent and benevolent will. Thus in its broadest and profoundest meaning the religious motive has been the most powerful of all in effecting reforms. The work of destroying evil may well enough be done in the spirit of the evil one; the healing of the evil and the substitution of the good in its stead is best done—if indeed it can otherwise be done at all—in the spirit of God, the redeemer of mankind.

And that God is indeed in and through it all, as the ethically uplifting, convicting, and illumining Spirit of humanity, is an indisputable corollary from the thesis proposed by the conception of Divine Being which modern science, philosophy, and theology encourage us to construct and to hold. This conception is that of a Living God, immanent in nature, in history, and in the soul of man, for the redemption of the world. It is the practical faith in this truth which summons all the true sons of God to work in the spirit of sympathy and obedience with the Father for the realization of that far-off divine event.

Has this form of religious faith become of late less confident and effective? That the social obligation was never before so keenly felt and the value of social co-operation never before so highly estimated, we may gladly admit. But has it not lacked that fine touch of religious enthusiasm, confidence, and patience in hope, which comes from the faith that God is in the world bringing the world back to himself? It is this that makes one man who has it worth a thousand who have it not. For in spiritual conflicts that is true which Napoleon declared to be true of battles fought with carnal weapons, "*À la guerre les hommes ne sont rien; c'est un homme qui est tout.*"